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**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**RIN 0648-XE232**

**Endangered and Threatened Species; Recovery Plans**

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice of availability; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** We, NMFS, announce that the *Proposed Endangered Species Act (ESA) Recovery Plan for Snake River Fall Chinook Salmon* (Proposed Plan) is available for public review and comment. The Proposed Plan addresses the Snake River Fall Chinook Salmon (*Onchorhynchus tshawytscha*) evolutionarily significant unit (ESU), which is listed as threatened under the ESA.

The geographic area covered by the Proposed Plan is the lower and middle mainstem Snake River and tributaries as well as the mainstem Columbia River below its confluence with the Snake River. As required under the ESA, the Proposed Plan contains objective, measurable delisting criteria, site-specific management actions necessary to achieve the Proposed Plan's goals, and estimates of the time and cost required to implement recovery actions. We are soliciting review and comment from the public and all interested parties on the Proposed Plan.

**DATES:** We will consider and address, as appropriate, all substantive comments received during the comment period. Comments on the Proposed Plan must be received no later than 5 p.m. Pacific daylight time on *[insert date 60 days after date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER]*.

**ADDRESSES:** You may submit comments on the Public Draft Recovery Plan by the following methods:

- *Electronic Submissions:* Submit all electronic public comments via:  
*nmfs.wcr.snakeriverfallchinookplan@noaa.gov*. Please include “Comments on Snake River Fall Chinook Salmon Recovery Plan” in the subject line of the email.
- *Mail:* Patricia Dornbusch, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1201 N.E. Lloyd Boulevard, Suite 1100, Portland, OR 97232.
- *Facsimile:* (503) 230-5441.

*Instructions:*

Electronic copies of the Proposed Plan are available on the NMFS Web site at:

[http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected\\_species/salmon\\_steelhead/recovery\\_planning\\_and\\_implementation/snake\\_river/current\\_snake\\_river\\_recovery\\_plan\\_documents.html](http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected_species/salmon_steelhead/recovery_planning_and_implementation/snake_river/current_snake_river_recovery_plan_documents.html).

Persons wishing to obtain an electronic copy on CD ROM of the Proposed Plan may do so by calling Bonnie Hossack at (503) 736-4741 or by emailing a request to [bonnie.hossack@noaa.gov](mailto:bonnie.hossack@noaa.gov) with the subject line “CD ROM Request for Snake River Fall Chinook Salmon Recovery Plan.”

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Patricia Dornbusch, NMFS Snake River Fall Chinook Salmon Recovery Coordinator, at (503) 230-5430, or [patty.dornbusch@noaa.gov](mailto:patty.dornbusch@noaa.gov).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

**Background**

We are responsible for developing and implementing recovery plans for Pacific salmon and steelhead listed under the ESA of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*). Recovery means that the listed species and their ecosystems are sufficiently restored, and their future

secured, to the point that the protections of the ESA are no longer necessary. Section 4(f)(1) of the ESA requires that recovery plans include, to the extent practicable: (1) objective, measurable criteria which, when met, would result in a determination that the species is no longer threatened or endangered; (2) site-specific management actions necessary to achieve the plan's goals; and (3) estimates of the time required and costs to implement recovery actions. The ESA requires the development of recovery plans for each listed species unless such a plan would not promote its recovery.

We believe it is essential to have local support of recovery plans by those whose activities directly affect the listed species and whose continued commitment and leadership will be needed to implement the necessary recovery actions. We therefore support and participate in collaborative efforts to develop recovery plans that involve state, tribal, and federal entities, local communities, and other stakeholders. For this Proposed Plan for threatened Snake River Fall Chinook Salmon, we worked collaboratively with state, tribal, and federal partners to produce a recovery plan that satisfies the ESA requirements. We have determined that this *Proposed ESA Recovery Plan for Snake River Fall Chinook Salmon* meets the statutory requirements for a recovery plan and are proposing to adopt it as the ESA recovery plan for this threatened species. Section 4(f) of the ESA, as amended in 1988, requires that public notice and an opportunity for public review and comment be provided prior to final approval of a recovery plan. This notice solicits comments on this Proposed Plan.

### **Development of the Proposed Plan**

For the purpose of recovery planning for the ESA-listed species of Pacific salmon and steelhead in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, NMFS designated five geographically based

“recovery domains.” The Snake River Fall Chinook Salmon ESU spawning range is in the Interior Columbia domain. For each domain, NMFS appointed a team of scientists, nominated for their geographic and species expertise, to provide a solid scientific foundation for recovery plans. The Interior Columbia Technical Recovery Team included biologists from NMFS, other federal agencies, states, tribes, and academic institutions.

A primary task for the Interior Columbia Technical Recovery Team was to recommend criteria for determining when each component population within an ESU or distinct population segment (DPS) should be considered viable (i.e., when they have a low risk of extinction over a 100-year period) and when ESUs or DPSs have a risk of extinction consistent with no longer needing the protections of the ESA. All Technical Recovery Teams used the same biological principles for developing their recommendations; these principles are described in the NOAA technical memorandum *Viable Salmonid Populations and the Recovery of Evolutionarily Significant Units* (McElhany *et al.*, 2000). Viable salmonid populations (VSP) are defined in terms of four parameters: abundance, productivity or growth rate, spatial structure, and diversity.

We also collaborated with state, tribal, and federal biologists and resource managers to provide technical information used to develop the Proposed Plan. In addition, NMFS established a multi-state (Idaho, Oregon, and Washington), tribal, and federal partners’ regional forum called the Snake River Coordination Group that addresses the four ESA-listed Snake River salmon and steelhead species. They met twice a year to be briefed and provide technical and policy information to NMFS. We presented regular updates on the status of this Proposed Plan to the Snake River Coordination Group and posted draft chapters on NMFS’ West Coast Region Snake

River recovery planning web page. We also made full drafts of the Proposed Plan available for review to the state, tribal, and Federal entities with whom we collaborated to develop the plan.

In addition to the Proposed Plan, we developed and incorporated the *Module for the Ocean Environment* (Fresh *et al.* 2014) as Appendix D to address Snake River Fall Chinook Salmon recovery needs in the Columbia River estuary, plume, and Pacific Ocean. To address recovery needs related to the Columbia River Hydropower System, we developed and incorporated the *Supplemental Recovery Plan Module for Snake River Salmon and Steelhead Mainstem Columbia River Hydropower Projects* (NMFS 2014b) as Appendix E of this Proposed Plan. To address recovery needs related to the Lower Columbia River mainstem and estuary, we incorporated the *Columbia River Estuary ESA Recovery Plan Module for Salmon and Steelhead* (NMFS 2011a) as Appendix F. To address recovery needs for fishery harvest management in the mainstem Snake and Columbia Rivers, Columbia River estuary, and ocean, we developed and incorporated the *Snake River Harvest Module* (NMFS 2014a) as Appendix G.

The Proposed Plan, including the recovery plan modules, is now available for public review and comment.

### **Contents of Proposed Plan**

The Proposed Plan contains biological background and contextual information that includes description of the ESU, the planning area, and the context of the plan's development. It presents relevant information on ESU structure, guidelines for assessing salmonid population and ESU status, and a brief summary of Interior Columbia Technical Recovery Team products on population structure and species status. It also presents NMFS' proposed biological viability criteria and threats criteria for delisting.

As described in Chapter 2 of the Proposed Plan, the historical Snake River fall Chinook salmon ESU consisted of two populations. The population above the Hells Canyon Dam Complex is extirpated, leaving only one extant population – the Lower Mainstem Snake River population. An ESU with a single population would be at greater extinction risk than an ESU with multiple populations. This is a key consideration in the proposed Snake River fall Chinook salmon biological viability criteria, since there is more than one possible scenario for achieving the criteria. The proposed viability criteria include two possible scenarios and a placeholder for developing additional scenarios that would be consistent with delisting. Scenario A focuses on achieving ESA delisting with two populations (i.e., the extant Lower Mainstem Snake River population and a recovered Middle Snake population above the Hells Canyon Complex). Scenario B illustrates a single-population pathway to delisting. The placeholder scenario describes a framework under which additional single-population scenarios could be developed that would involve developing natural production emphasis areas that would have a low percentage of hatchery-origin spawners. NMFS is interested in comments on how such additional scenarios might be developed, potentially for inclusion in the final recovery plan.

The Proposed Plan also describes specific information on the following: current status of Snake River Fall Chinook Salmon; limiting factors and threats throughout the life cycle that have contributed to the species decline; recovery strategies and actions addressing these limiting factors and threats; and a proposed research, monitoring, and evaluation program for adaptive management. For recovery actions, the Proposed Plan includes a table summarizing each proposed action, life stage affected, estimated costs, timing, and potential implementing entities. It also describes how implementation, prioritization of actions, and adaptive management will

proceed. The Proposed Plan also summarizes time and costs (Chapter 9) required to implement recovery actions. In some cases, costs of implementing actions could not be determined at this time and NMFS is interested in additional information regarding scale, scope, and costs of these actions. We are also particularly interested in comments on establishing appropriate forums to coordinate implementation of the recovery plan.

### **How NMFS and Others Expect to Use the Plan**

With approval of the final recovery plan, we will commit to implement the actions in the plan for which we have authority and funding; encourage other federal and state agencies and tribal governments to implement recovery actions for which they have responsibility, authority, and funding; and work cooperatively with the public and local stakeholders on implementation of other actions. We expect the recovery plan to guide us and other federal agencies in evaluating federal actions under ESA section 7, as well as in implementing other provisions of the ESA and other statutes. For example, the plan will provide greater biological context for evaluating the effects that a proposed action may have on a species by providing delisting criteria, information on priority areas for addressing specific limiting factors, and information on how the ESU can tolerate varying levels of risk.

When we are considering a species for delisting, the agency will examine whether the section 4(a)(1) listing factors have been addressed. To assist in this examination, we will use the delisting criteria described in Section 3.2 and Section 3.3 of the Proposed Plan, which include both biological criteria and criteria addressing each of the ESA section 4(a)(1) listing factors, as well as any other relevant data and policy considerations.

We will also work with the proposed implementation structure, as described in Chapter 8 of the Proposed Plan, to coordinate among existing forums, develop implementation priorities, and address science and adaptive management issues.

## **Conclusion**

Section 4(f)(1)(B) of the ESA requires that recovery plans incorporate, to the extent practicable, (1) objective, measurable criteria which, when met, would result in a determination that the species is no longer threatened or endangered; (2) site-specific management actions necessary to achieve the plan's goals; and (3) estimates of the time required and costs to implement recovery actions. We conclude that the Proposed Plan meets the requirements of ESA section 4(f) and are proposing to adopt it as the *ESA Recovery Plan for Snake River Fall Chinook Salmon*.

## **Public Comments Solicited**

We are soliciting written comments on the Proposed Plan. All substantive comments received by the date specified above will be considered and incorporated, as appropriate, prior to our decision whether to approve the plan. While we invite comments on all aspects of the Proposed Plan, we are particularly interested in comments on developing specific scenarios to address the placeholder recovery scenario, comments on the cost of recovery actions for which we have not yet determined implementation costs, and comments on establishing an appropriate implementation forum for the plan. We will issue a news release announcing the adoption and availability of the final plan. We will post on the NMFS West Coast Region Web site ([www.wcr.noaa.gov](http://www.wcr.noaa.gov)) a summary of, and responses to, the comments received, along with electronic copies of the final plan and its appendices.



## Literature Cited

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**Authority:** 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*

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